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THE IOWA SOCIETY
OF THE
SONS OF THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION

BY
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*THE IOWA SOCIETY OF THE SONS OF
THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION*

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THE IOWA SOCIETY OF THE SONS OF THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION

The Iowa Society of the Sons of the American Revolution is a part of the National Society of the Sons of the American Revolution. It recognizes all State societies of Sons of the American Revolution as coëquals and their members as compatriots. Societies now exist in thirty-six States, in the District of Columbia, in France, and in the Sandwich Islands. The membership of these societies all told is not less than eleven thousand.

The objects of the Iowa Society of the Sons of the American Revolution are essentially patriotic and educational on patriotic lines, and are best set forth in Article III of its constitution which reads as follows:

The objects of this society shall be to perpetuate the memory of the men, who by their services or sacrifices during the war of the American Revolution, achieved the independence of the American people; to unite and promote fellowship among their descendants; to inspire them and the community at large with a more profound reverence for the principles of the government founded by our forefathers; to encourage historical research in relation to the American Revolution; to acquire and preserve the records of the individual services of the patriots of the war, as well as documents, relics and land-marks; to mark the scenes of the Revolution by appropriate memorials; to celebrate the anniversaries of the prominent events of the war; to foster true patriotism; to maintain and extend the institutions of American freedom; and to carry out the purposes expressed in the

Preamble to the Constitution of our country and the injunctions of Washington in his farewell address to the American people.¹

The classes of persons from which the membership of the society has been and may be drawn are enumerated in Article IV of the constitution, which provides that any man who is "of the age of twenty one-years or over, and a citizen of good repute in the community, is the lineal descendant of an ancestor, who was at all times unfailing in his loyalty to, and rendered actual service in, the cause of American independence, either as an officer, soldier, seaman, marine, militiaman or minute man, in the armed forces of the Continental Congress, or any one the several Colonies or States; or as a signer of the Declaration of Independence; or as a member of a Committee of Safety or Correspondence; or as a member of any Continental, Provincial, or Colonial Congress or Legislature; or as a civil officer, either of one of the Colonies or States or of the national government; or as a recognized patriot who performed actual service by overt acts of resistance to the authority of Great Britain" may become a member.

Without attempting to trace the various steps which led to the formation of the National Society of the Sons of the American Revolution in 1889 by representatives of eighteen State societies, and which national organization had made substantial growth before the Iowa society was founded; and without attempting to differentiate between the "Sons of the American Revolution" and the "Sons of the Revolution," whose objects and aspirations are practically identical,

¹ This recital of objects is taken from the constitution of the national society and applies to every society of Sons of the American Revolution.

the history of the organization and progress of the Iowa Society of the Sons of the American Revolution will be briefly related in the following paragraphs.

Public request having been made through the newspaper press that all gentlemen in Iowa who were descended from soldiers of the Revolution should make themselves known, and notice to such as responded having been given by Hon. H. E. J. Boardman of Marshalltown, a meeting preliminary to the organization of a State society of the Sons of the American Revolution was held on the 6th day of July, 1893, in the horticultural rooms of the Iowa State capitol at Des Moines, Iowa.

The meeting was called to order at 10:30 A. M. by Hon. H. E. J. Boardman of Marshalltown, who in a brief address stated the object of the meeting. Franklin G. Pierce of Marshalltown was elected Secretary. A committee of three, of which Mr. Boardman should be chairman, was directed to be appointed by the chair "to take the names of the prospective members and so far as possible to look into their qualifications for membership." The chair named as the other members of that committee, O. W. Munsell of Des Moines and W. H. H. Asbury of Ottumwa. The following gentlemen were present at this first meeting: R. D. McGeehon, Atlantic; O. W. Munsell, Des Moines; L. S. Kilborn, Marshalltown; T. F. Bradford, Marshalltown; J. H. Strong, Des Moines; F. D. Hussey, Des Moines; H. E. J. Boardman, Marshalltown; F. G. Pierce, Marshalltown; and W. H. H. Asbury, Ottumwa.

At the afternoon session the committee reported the names of thirty-one persons who "have made such present or tem-

porary showing as to be eligible to vote and take part in the temporary organization." Their report was adopted. The following temporary officers were then elected: Hon. H. E. J. Boardman, President; J. H. Strong, Vice President; F. G. Pierce, Secretary; and O. W. Munsell, Treasurer.

At the same meeting a committee consisting of J. R. Sage, Peter A. Dey, and J. H. Keatley was appointed to draft a constitution and by-laws. A committee consisting of the President, Vice President, and Secretary was appointed to pass upon questions of eligibility. The officers were instructed to prepare a circular stating the objects of the Society and the qualifications of members, and send several copies to each of the temporary members. Finally the members adjourned to meet at the Iowa State capitol building at 10:00 A. M., September 5, 1893.

At the September, 1893, meeting, the committee on credentials reported a recommendation for the admission of the following persons as members: R. D. McGeehon, Atlantic; Samuel Berry Evans, Ottumwa; Frank Ashley Millard, Burlington; W. H. H. Asbury, Ottumwa; D. C. Mott, What Cheer; Iram Allen Sawyer, Keokuk; Henry E. J. Boardman, Marshalltown; Theoderic F. Bradford, Marshalltown; Franklin Gilman Pierce, Marshalltown; Charles E. Boardman, Marshalltown; Charles H. E. Boardman, Marshalltown; Orson W. Munsell, Des Moines; Albert Strong, Winterset; W. P. Hepburn, Clarinda; Stephen B. Packard, Marshalltown; W. H. Bremner, Marshalltown; Levi B. Raymond, Hampton; Lucien S. Kilborn, Marshalltown; John R. Sage, Des Moines; Charles D. Shepard, Gilbert Station;

Timothy Hunt, Grinnell; Frank S. Hunt, Dubuque; Erastus B. Soper, Emmetsburg; Edward H. Hazen, Des Moines; and Edmund M. Vittum, Grinnell. The report was adopted.

A constitution was then reported and adopted; and permanent officers were elected, who held office until January 15, 1895. A vote was passed that all applicants whose cases shall be favorably acted upon by February 22, 1894, be considered charter members. The organization being completed, the meeting adjourned sine die.

All the gentlemen above mentioned became members of the society. Henry E. J. Boardman, Charles E. Boardman, and Orson W. Munsell have passed away. The others, with one exception, remain members to this day.

The following compatriots have served as President of the Iowa society and in the order named: Hon. Henry Elderkin Jewett Boardman, Marshalltown; Col. Levi Beardsley Raymond, Hampton; Col. Albert Winfield Swalm, Oskaloosa; Hon. William Henry Wheeler, Des Moines; Hon. George Herbert Richardson, Belmont; Major Francis Hamner Loring, Oskaloosa; Hon. Damon Noble Sprague, Wapello; Hon. William Henry Baily, Des Moines; Prof. Herman Knapp, Ames; and Col. Warren Scott Dungan, Chariton.

The following compatriots have served as Secretary: Franklin Gilman Pierce, Esq., Marshalltown; Charles Henry Earnest Boardman, Esq., Marshalltown; Capt. Edward Ridgway Hutchins, Des Moines; and Capt. Elbridge Drew Hadley, Des Moines.

The several Treasurers have been: Capt. Erastus Burrows Soper, Emmetsburg; Herman Knapp, Esq., Ames;

Willard Secor, Esq., Forest City; and Frank Benjamin Clark, Ottumwa.

The society had but one Registrar, Dr. Edward Hamlin Hazen of Des Moines.

As Historians the society has had the services of Capt. Samuel Berry Evans, Ottumwa; Judge Geo. W. Wakefield, Sioux City; and Dr. Edward Hamlin Hazen, Des Moines.

The roll of Chaplains bears the names of Rev. Edmund March Vittum, Grinnell; Rev. Evarts Kent, Victor; Rev. Ira B. Ryan, Leon; Rev. Ezra Butler Newcomb, Keokuk; and Rev. James Balloch Chase, Ocheyedan.

The total number admitted to membership in the Iowa society has been two hundred and thirty-seven. This means that the number of ancestors whose services are recorded is about three hundred. The losses from death, transfers, and other "casualties" reach forty-two, leaving a membership to-day of one hundred and ninety-five.

Local chapters have been organized in Iowa as follows: Lexington Chapter, Keokuk; Woodbury Chapter, Sioux City; Ottumwa Chapter, Ottumwa; Ben Franklin Chapter, Des Moines; Blackhawk Chapter, Wapello; and Washington Chapter, Ames.

Organized and existing in a locality many hundreds of miles distant from the scenes of the Revolution, military and political, it has of course been impracticable for the Iowa Society to preserve the "relics and land-marks" of the Revolution or to "mark the scenes of the Revolution by appropriate memorials." However, the pursuit of historical research and the cultivation of true patriotism have been

steadily kept in view, although unity in definite purpose has not been easily attained among compatriots widely scattered and of diverse education and occupation.

One specific instance of the activity of the Iowa society may be given. When Iowa troops were called for participation in the Spanish War of 1898, the Iowa society in annual session voted that a flag be given to the first Iowa regiment to march to the war. In pursuance of this instruction, President George Herbert Richardson, in well chosen words on behalf of the society, presented a beautiful silk flag to the Fiftieth Regiment of Iowa National Guard. It was borne with gallantry and came back without a stain, actual or figurative, and reposes in the capitol building at Des Moines.

The dead have also been remembered. About three years ago the attention of patriotic societies in Iowa was drawn to the fact that one or more soldiers of the Revolutionary War had spent their last days on Iowa soil. Attention was first drawn to the grave of William Blair who was buried at Kossuth, in Des Moines County; and it was proposed by the Sons of the American Revolution to erect in the Historical Department at Des Moines a tablet to his memory. Before the matter took tangible shape it was found that five of the patriots of 1776 were known to have been buried in Iowa. These are: William Blair, Kossuth; John Osborn, Center Point; Timothy Brown, Washington; George Perkins, Lee county; and Charles Shepherd, near Mt. Pleasant. The first grave was marked by a fine monument erected by descendants; the second had a monument erected by the G. A. R. and citizens; the third could not be

located except that it was in an abandoned cemetery; the fourth though identified was not marked; the fifth could not be found except that it was known to be in a certain forty acre tract. Later a monument was erected to Charles Shepherd in the cemetery at Mt. Pleasant at the expense of the State. The grave of Timothy Brown has been found through the well directed efforts of Mr. A. R. Miller of Washington, Iowa, who took the matter up with zealous interest. The ashes of Timothy Brown have been re-interred in the Soldiers' Plat in a cemetery at Washington. It is understood that the Daughters of the American Revolution, who were largely instrumental in securing the State appropriation for the monument to Charles Shepherd, are moving to have fitting honor paid to the memory of George Perkins.

So certain were the Sons of the American Revolution that all the well authenticated graves of Revolutionary soldiers in Iowa had become known, that the Iowa society, in their desire to render fitting honor to all, have had a bronze tablet made commemorative of the lives and services of the five soldiers named and have had the same placed in the Hall of History of the Historical Department of Iowa, at Des Moines. The cost of the tablet was \$265.00 in New York. It was designed and made by Tiffany & Co., and is artistic and elegant.

Rumors have arisen from time to time of the existence of graves of other Revolutionary soldiers in Iowa; but upon investigation they were found groundless or mythical, or at least doubtful. The latest rumor is that of the existence of the grave of John Lepper, a Revolutionary soldier who was

buried near DeWitt. This rumor coming from a grandson living at Creighton, Neb., has upon investigation proved to be well founded.

The information came by letter to Hon. Charles Aldrich, Curator of the Historical Department of Iowa, who with his usual zeal and promptness corresponded with the Commissioner of Pensions, and from that official received definite information which shows that John Lepper was a Revolutionary soldier. Other items of interest relative to his service were also obtained from the same source. It appears that John Lepper enlisted in August, 1780, in Capt. Harrison's company of New York troops (regiment not given) and served two and one-half months; enlisted again in April, 1781, in Capt. French's company of Col. Marinus Willet's regiment, and served nine months; enlisted and served later in Capt. Cannon's company of the same regiment fourteen months, making two years one and one-half months all told. He was engaged in the battle of Johnstown, which was fought in October, 1781, between Col. Willet's regiment and a force of British regulars, Tories, and Indians, under the Tory leader, Walter Butler, whose forces in the battle were routed. Lepper resided at Johnstown when he enlisted. He applied for a pension which was allowed October 17, 1832, his residence being Greenfield, Erie county, Penn. He married Mary Prime, August 28, 1803, at Stone Arabia, N. Y. He died at DeWitt, Iowa, August 17, 1840.

The death of John Lepper having occurred in 1840, there is very little probability that any person is living in DeWitt or in Clinton County who was there at the time of his death.

It is ascertained that he was buried about three miles northwest of DeWitt on the northwest quarter of the southwest quarter of section one in township eighty-one of range three.

Persons living in DeWitt are confident of their ability to identify the grave of John Lepper when a suitable season arrives. The Iowa Society of the Sons of the American Revolution, or individual members acting in its behalf, will then take steps to cause the grave of this soldier of the Revolution to be properly marked and duly honored.

Coming in contact with mementoes of past valor or impressed with memories of past struggles for liberty, one feels that he is in the invisible presence of great deeds, unrivaled valor, a peerless patriotism, and the spirits of departed heroes whose example cannot be too carefully guarded, whose deeds are worthy of most hearty commendation, whose services to freedom are priceless, whose memories cannot be too highly cherished, and the fruits of whose triumph cannot receive a care that is too solicitous.

And so for the preservation of these priceless possessions, for the purpose of impressing these lessons upon the people of to-day, for the honoring of the patriotic dead of the last third of the eighteenth century in America, the Sons of the American Revolution are organized. Among the patriotic orders of these days, the Sons of the American Revolution hold an honorable place. The growth of the order is in proportion to the completeness of the information brought home to those eligible to membership, as to its principles, its objects, and its work.

The society is not maintained to afford opportunities for the members to admire each other on account of the patri-

otic stock from which they are descended. No one knows better than its members that the estimate in which the order is held does not depend so much upon who their *ancestors were*, as upon what *the members are*. They are associated together not to draw attention to themselves—connected without their own volition by ties of consanguinity with a generation of patriots,—not to shine with the borrowed radiance of others' renown, but by emphasizing the patriotism of the fathers of the republic to instill lessons of patriotism into the minds of the people of America of to-day and their children for the well being of our country.

The patriotic lessons of history they cannot teach except they learn them. To learn these lessons fully or approximately the members must be zealous in the study of their country's history—an ever delightful occupation since that history has been glorious.

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